

Sūrah 78

Al-Naba'

(The Tiding)

(Makkan Period)

Title

The *Sūrah*'s title is taken from Verse 2 in which the expression *al-naba'* (the tiding) occurs. Far from being a mere nominal title, this phrase encapsulates the *Sūrah*'s main theme, namely tidings of the Last Day and the Hereafter. Therefore, the whole *Sūrah* revolves round this subject matter.

Period of Revelation

As already indicated in the Introduction to *Sūrah al-Mursalāt*, the group of *Sūrahs*, from *al-Qiyāmah* (75) to *al-Nāzi'āt* (79), addresses the same theme. These appear to have been revealed in the early part of the Makkan period.

Subject Matter and Themes

As in *Sūrah al-Mursalāt*, this *Sūrah* affirms the reality of the Last Day and the Hereafter. It warns man against the consequences of rejecting this doctrine.

When the Prophet (peace be upon him) commenced his call to the truth in Makkah, it rested on these three doctrines: (1) Not to associate anyone with Allah in His divinity; (2) To accept the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) as Allah's Messenger, and (3) To believe that the world will disintegrate on the Last Day. This will be followed by the resurrection of all the dead in their original bodies, bodies they had during their lives in this world. All this will mark the commencement of the Hereafter. Everyone will be called to account regarding his/her beliefs and deeds. Those who had believed and performed good deeds will be sent to their eternal abode in Paradise. Conversely, the unbelievers and evil-doers will be consigned for ever to Hell.

Of these three doctrines, the first was deeply resented by the unbelieving Makkans. Yet, they did not altogether deny the existence of God. In fact, they recognized Him as the supreme Lord, Creator and Sustainer. They conceded that even those whom they took as God's partners were His creation. Their main objection to the doctrine of monotheism stemmed from their mistaken notion that their gods had a share in God's divinity and attributes.

As for the doctrine of Messengership, they refused to accept the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) as Allah's Messenger. Yet it was hard for them to dismiss him as a liar, fraudulent or selfish person. He had after all spent forty years of his life in their midst, day and night. So, on the contrary, they had regarded him all along for these forty years of his pre-Prophetic life as a mature, wise and trustworthy person of impeccable character and conduct. Notwithstanding the plethora of allegations raised by them, these unbelieving Makkans found it hard to reconcile themselves to the idea that he was false in his claim to Messengership.

The doctrine of the Hereafter was, however, the most problematic for the Makkans. When they came to learn of it, they dismissed it, mockingly, out of hand. For them, it was something implausible, rather unimaginable. Indeed, they projected it as incredible so as to discredit Islam. Nonetheless, if they were to be converted to Islam, it was essential that they believe in this doctrine. Without their conviction in the Hereafter, they could not adopt a serious, sincere outlook on life, one that would enable them to distinguish

truth from falsehood. The entire value system of good and evil is premised on the doctrine of the Hereafter. In the absence of their belief in it, the Makkans could not give up their this-worldliness. Nor could they follow the way of Islam along the desired lines. Hence the emphasis on the doctrine of the Hereafter in the early Makkan *Sūrah*s. In essence, these seek to instil a strong conviction in their hearts about Life in the Next World. Such arguments are adduced as reinforce belief in this article of faith. Arguments for the truthfulness of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) as Allah's Messenger and for the genuineness of the Qur'ān as Allah's Book, are also interspersed in these *Sūrah*s.

Having noted the rationale behind this emphasis on the doctrine of the Hereafter in the *Sūrah*s of the early Makkan period, let us now turn to the overall subject matter of this *Sūrah*. First, mention is made of the on-going discussions and whispering campaign in the alleys of Makkah regarding the concept of the Hereafter. This is followed by posing these questions to the unbelievers: Do they not look at the earth spread by Allah like a bed for them? Do they not observe the high and mighty mountains fixed as pegs by Him? Do they not consider how He has created mankind in pairs as men and women? Do they not ponder over the phenomenon of sleep, which is a means of repose, reinvigorating them for work? Do they not reflect on why they need a few hours' sleep after work? Do they not note the alternation of day and night, which is perfectly suited for their needs? This is a regular, constant process whereby day is overtaken by night, which in turn, is followed by day. Do they not think about the strong sky built above them? Do they not marvel at the sun, the source of heat and light for them? Do they not study the phenomenon of rain, of which its abundant water helps them grow grain and vegetation? Do these clear signs not underscore that the All-Powerful Lord, Who has brought all this into being, may not cause the Last Day and resurrect the dead? Does the perfection and wisdom underlying the working of the universe not convince them of a purpose behind creation? As each and every component of the universe is highly useful and purposive in its own right, the universe as a whole too, has not been created as mere sport. It is patently silly to assume that while man may be

invested with authority in this world, he may get away without recompense after his death. There must be reward and punishment for good and bad performance respectively.

After adducing these weighty arguments, it is asserted that the Day of Judgement is bound to happen at its appointed term. With one blow of the trumpet, the tidings about the Last Day will come true. Man is, no doubt, free to accept or reject the doctrine of the Hereafter. However, on the Last Day, all the dead, no matter where they lie, will appear in throngs in order to present their records. The unbelievers' rejection of the Hereafter cannot avert this eventuality.

Verses 21-30 clarify that the unbelievers, who disregard divine recompense and belie divine signs, will be called to account for their each and every deed. Hellfire has already been prepared for them. They will be recompensed in full for their misdeeds. Verses 31-36 relate the rewards to be showered upon the believers who, recognizing the truth of their accountability in the Hereafter, felt concerned and did good. They are assured of rewards over and above what they deserve.

The *Sūrah's* concluding part recounts the proceedings of the divine court. No one will, without Allah's leave, be able to intercede for anyone, let alone secure anyone else's deliverance. Those allowed to intercede will recommend the cases of only those about whom they have such permission. Moreover, they will not make any undue or unfair recommendation. Only the devotees of truth will be considered for intercession and pardon of their sins. Those who defied Allah and rejected the truth will not have any helper or supporter in the Hereafter.

This note of warning marks the *Sūrah's* conclusion that the Last Day is inevitable. It should not be thought of as a distant, remote possibility. Man is nonetheless free to select Allah's way or disregard this warning. In the latter eventuality, he will, however, face the dire consequences of his misdeeds. Then he will rue, and wish that he had not been born. Remorsefully, he will curse the worldly pleasures to which he had been addicted.